



Approved For Release 2002/01/15 : CIA-RDP80T00942A001100060001-6

Assessment
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Recent Developments in South Korean - Japanese Security Cooperation

An Intelligence Assessment

Secret

PL 75-40793
June 1979

Approved For Release 2002/01/15 : CIA-RDP80T00942A001100060001-6

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Recent Developments in South Korean - Japanese Security Cooperation (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

*Information as of 4 June 1979 has been used
in preparing this report.*

This paper was prepared by the East Asia-Pacific
Division of the Office of Political Analysis. Comments
and queries are welcome and should be directed to



This paper has been coordinated with the Office of
Strategic Research. (U)

Secret

PA 79-10249
June 1979

Approved For Release 2002/01/15 : CIA-RDP80T00942A001100060001-6

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Recent Developments in South Korean - Japanese Security Cooperation (U)

Overview

Exchanges between Japanese and South Korean officials and legislators on security affairs have become more frequent over the past few months. Although the South Koreans are taking the lead in promoting these contacts, Seoul's initiatives are meeting with a more positive response from the Japanese than in the past. To date, the interplay has been more symbolic than substantive, but it is nonetheless significant on several counts:

- Seoul and Tokyo are permitting exchanges at a higher level and more frequently and publicly than they have before.
- New organizational ties are being created to facilitate the discussion of security issues.
- In both countries, public reaction to these departures has been relatively calm.

Of direct interest to the United States are two initiatives taken at meetings of representatives from the two national legislatures:

- They have come out strongly against the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea.
- They want to draw US Congressmen into their discussions.

South Korean - Japanese security consultations will probably continue and expand, but they will probably not progress as fast or as far as the South Koreans would like. Mutual distrust and antipathy are still too strong. As in the past, the key constraint will be the Japanese reluctance to take actions or make commitments that would entail a direct security involvement in Korea. Although elements in the Japanese Government and ruling party now seem ready to discuss security issues more seriously and objectively with the South Koreans, Tokyo is still likely to take care that bilateral cooperation in defense matters remains low key and restricted. (C)

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Recent Japanese - South Korean Security Contacts

Beginning in early April, the Japanese, in response to South Korean initiatives, began taking limited military and political steps to broaden security relations with South Korea. The ensuing meetings brought together individuals at various levels acting in a variety of capacities—government officials, members of nonofficial legislative missions, and private, if influential, visitors. It is likely, however, that most of the Japanese involved would not have participated—or participated as enthusiastically as they reportedly have—without the tacit approval of Prime Minister Ohira. (C)

On 4 April, General Kim Chong-hwan, chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff, met in Tokyo with Yamashita Ganri, Director General of the Japan Defense Agency (JDA). General Kim's visit was notable in two respects. It was apparently the first such visit since 1969, and more important, Yamashita said that he was interested in visiting South Korea. (C)

From 13 to 16 April, Nakasone Yasuhiro, a rightwing conservative and leader of a major faction in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was in Seoul, where he met with President Pak and other high officials. He publicly stressed his belief that a continued US troop presence in the Republic of Korea (ROK) is essential to maintaining peace in Northeast Asia. (C)

Between 30 April and 5 May, General Nagano Shigeto, chief of staff of the Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces (SDF), traveled to the Republic of Korea for what was billed as a "military inspection tour." Japanese and South Koreans noted that this was the first visit in over four years by a senior officer of the SDF for other than strictly ceremonial purposes. Nagano apparently sought the visit so that he could be fully briefed on Korean questions before his visit to the United States from 13 to 24 May. (C)

Between 30 April and 1 May, simultaneously with the Nagano visit, Sakata Michita, former JDA director general and currently chairman of the Security Problems Research Council, went to South Korea at the head of a 13-man LDP delegation for the inauguration of the Japan-ROK Parliamentarians Security Council.

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a joint statement was issued at the end of the conference expressing opposition to the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea. (S NF NC)

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Sakata met with President Pak Chong-hui, and the two called for an expansion of consultations to include members of the US Congress. The Council is scheduled to meet again late this year or early next year. (S NF NC)

From **8 to 13 May**, shortly after the Sakata visit, Kanemaru Shin, Yamashita's predecessor as JDA director general and currently chairman of the LDP's influential Diet Policy Committee, led another LDP delegation to Seoul for talks with President Pak and other high South Korean officials.

eventual creation of what Kim Chong-pil referred to as a "tripartite security consultative organ." (S NF NC)

The Japanese have scheduled a number of other visits to Seoul later this summer. The most important would be that of Yamashita, which is currently scheduled for August or September, after his trip to the United States. In contrast to Kanemaru's abortive attempt to arrange a visit to Seoul last year, this time the way for Yamashita is being prepared very carefully. Periodic public references to the coming visit are designed to ensure that it takes no one by surprise. Yamashita has reportedly informed Prime Minister Ohira and Foreign Minister Sonoda in writing of his intention and has interpreted the absence of any response from them as tacit approval for the visit. If the visit does take place, it will be the first by an incumbent director general of the JDA. (S)

On **23 May**, the eighth annual general meeting of the Japanese-ROK Parliamentarians League convened in Tokyo. Seoul dispatched 49 members of the National Assembly, reportedly the largest delegation ever sent to Japan for a meeting of the League. On the Japanese side, 152 Dietmen participated, including prominent members of the opposition Democratic Socialist Party (DSP). Attending the meeting as a guest was Prime Minister Ohira, who touched lightly on the security issue by noting the importance of close ties between Japan and South Korea to regional peace and stability. (S NF NC)

South Korean and Japanese Objectives In Intensifying Security Consultations

The 200 delegates themselves were considerably less restrained in their approach to defense matters. Indeed, security questions were treated much more prominently and publicly than at any previous meeting of the League.

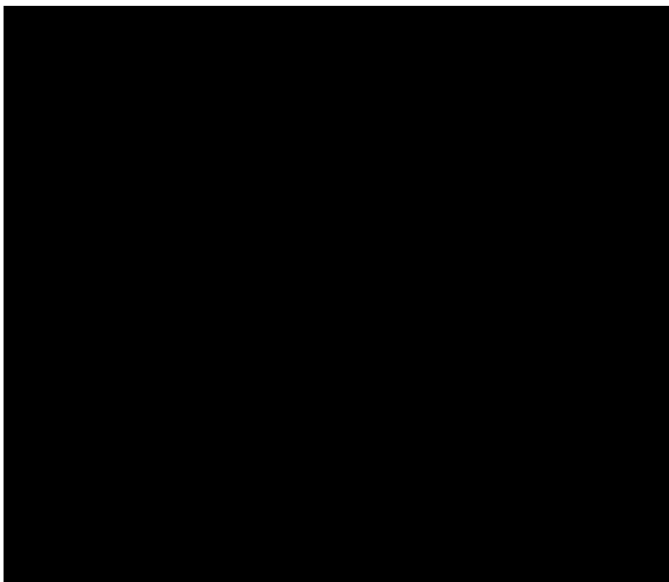
There is a strong consensus within the South Korean Government that there can be no substitute for the alliance with the United States and that whatever form of defense cooperation may emerge between South Korea and Japan must be placed within the context of the US guarantee.

The joint communique returned to the same themes, welcoming President Carter's coming visit to Japan and South Korea and calling for suspension of US troop withdrawal from South Korea. (S NF NC)

A joint ROK-Japan delegation is scheduled to visit the United States in late June to open contacts with US Congressmen. It hopes to prepare the way for the

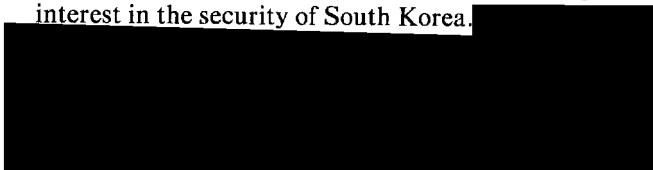
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There is no agreed set of objectives that is guiding the Japanese response to the South Korean overtures. Some Japanese, like Yamashita, Sakata, Kanemaru, and Okazaki, believe that Japan's economic, foreign policy, and security interests would be served by cooperating more closely with South Korea in the defense area. Many conservative and moderate opposition politicians—and members of the SDF—would support that position. But the Japanese Government has always seen the US defense commitment to South Korea as the basic ingredient of its own security policy toward Korea, and it is in that context that the recent flurry of meetings and joint communiqués should probably be seen. (S)

Prime Minister Ohira, like his predecessors, is interested in stressing to the United States the importance that Japan attaches to continued peace in Korea and to the role that the US military presence in the South plays in securing continued peace. With President Carter due in Tokyo and Seoul this month and expected to announce his decision on troop withdrawal, it may be that the Prime Minister is tacitly permitting senior representatives of his party, the JDA, and the SDF to enter into agreements with the South Koreans that will draw US attention to Japan's interest in the security of South Korea.



Future Prospects

The Japanese and South Koreans involved in the recent exchanges have themselves been surprised by the pace at which discussions have progressed. The South Koreans have been greatly encouraged by the LDP's willingness to participate in the Parliamentarians Security Council and the enthusiasm displayed by the Japanese over the past two months for opening a serious, substantive dialogue on defense problems. The South Koreans attribute this to a change in the climate of Japanese opinion on security issues in general and Korean-related security issues in particular. They see the Japanese as increasingly concerned about the Soviet threat, disturbed by renewed outbreaks of war in Indochina, prepared to support a larger defense effort, and in this context as willing to look more closely at the connection between the security of South Korea and the security of their own country. Similar observations have been made by Japanese Foreign Ministry officials, who have noted that the situation surrounding the Korean security issue is clearly different from a year ago. (S NF NC)

Officials in both governments have remarked upon, and expressed their surprise at, the comparatively calm popular reaction to what has been going on. Given the history of poor relations between the two countries, the mutual suspicion and antagonism that seems to permeate all levels of both societies and particularly the still powerful Japanese fear of somehow becoming involved in the event another war breaks out on the Peninsula, it would have been reasonable to anticipate loud protests in both countries. (S NF NC OC)

At least in the case of Japan, the absence of protest may be the result of a fortuitous combination of circumstances: the local elections in April, disarray in the opposition parties, and media preoccupation with the Grumman scandals. But it may also be that opinion is changing more rapidly than officials in either country have realized. What seems to be happening is that Japanese and South Koreans are coming to see a need to subordinate their traditional dislike of one another to their belief they must cooperate in stabilizing an increasingly uncertain security environment. In addition, Seoul and Tokyo may perceive a common interest in cooperating to persuade the United States to

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maintain its security commitment to, and its military presence in, South Korea. (s)

Significant as these new departures are, it is not likely that subsequent exchanges will move as rapidly as the South Koreans would like. Officials in the Japanese Foreign Ministry are skeptical about prospects for rapid movement. Misgivings in both countries, but particularly in Japan, will continue to operate as a check on increased cooperation in so sensitive an area as security. (c)

As for progress on concrete, substantive defense cooperation, little has come to light thus far beyond Sakata's remark in Seoul that Japan might provide not only bases, but also logistic support to bolster South Korean security. In principle, it would be logical for the two countries to concentrate on fostering cooperation between their intelligence, air, and naval forces. South Korean spokesmen have said that the only nonnegotiable possibility would be the presence of Japanese soldiers on South Korean soil.

At present, all of this is little more than speculation. Some time will have to be spent by both governments preparing their respective domestic constituencies before cooperation can progress beyond talks and exchanges of visits to more substantive matters. (c)

The pace and direction of future consultations are likely to be strongly influenced by the impression that leaders of the two countries have of general US security policy toward Northeast Asia and, more specifically, of the strength of the US security commitment to South Korea. In that connection, they will be monitoring closely US policy on troop withdrawals. (c)

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